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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

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In re Patent No. 6,079,668
Issue Date: June 27, 2000
Application No. 09/007,616
Filed: January 15, 1998
For: PORTABLE HELIPAD

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ON PETITION

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.378(b), filed May 18, 2012, to accept the unavoidably delayed payment of a maintenance fee for the above-identified patent.

The petition is **DISMISSED**.

If reconsideration of this decision is desired, a petition for reconsideration under 37 CFR 1.378(e) must be filed within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. No extension of this 2-month time limit can be granted under 37 CFR 1.136(a) or (b). Any such petition for reconsideration must be accompanied by the petition fee of \$400 as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(f). The petition for reconsideration should include an exhaustive attempt to provide the lacking item(s) noted below, since, after a decision on the petition for reconsideration, the Director will undertake no further reconsideration or review of the matter. This includes statements by all persons with direct knowledge of the cause of the delay, setting forth the facts, as they know them. If a request for reconsideration is filed, it must establish that the entire delay in the submission of the maintenance fee was unavoidable.

The patent issued June 27, 2000. The 7.5 year maintenance fee could have been paid from June 27, 2007 to December 26, 2007, or with a surcharge during the period from December 27, 2007 to June 27, 2008. Petitioner did not do so. Accordingly, the patent expired June 28, 2008.

A petition to accept the delayed payment of a maintenance fee under 35 USC 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b) must be accompanied by (1) an adequate showing that the delay was unavoidable, since reasonable care was taken to insure that the maintenance fee would be paid timely, (2) payment of the appropriate maintenance fee, unless previously submitted, and (3) payment of the surcharge set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(i)(1). This petition lacks item (1) above.

A petition under 37 CFR 1.378(b) for the acceptance of an unavoidably delayed payment of maintenance fee is considered under the same standard as that for reviving an application

unavoidably abandoned under 37 CFR 1.137(a) because 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) uses the identical language, *i.e.*, "unavoidable" delay.¹ Decisions reviving abandoned applications have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable.² In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account."³ Finally, a petition to revive an application as unavoidably abandoned cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing the cause of the unavoidable delay.⁴

The general standard applied by the Office requires petitioner to establish that petitioner treated the patent the same as a reasonable and prudent person would treat his or her most important business.⁵ However, "the question of whether an applicant's delay in prosecuting an application was unavoidable [will] be decided on a case by case basis, taking all of the facts and circumstances into account".⁶ Nonawareness of the content of, or misunderstanding of PTO statutes, PTO rules, the MPEP or Official Gazette notices, do not constitute unavoidable delay.⁷ The statute requires a "showing" by petitioner. Therefore, petitioner has the burden of proof.

The word 'unavoidable' ... is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business.⁸

PETITIONER'S ARGUMENT

¹ Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995)(quoting In re Patent No. 4,409,763, 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1988)).

² Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (Comm'r Pat. 1887) (the term "unavoidable" "is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful man in relation to their most important business"); In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (D.C. Cir. 1912); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (Comm'r Pat. 1913).

³ Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). (citing Potter v. Dann, 201 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 574 (D.D.C. 1978) for the proposition that counsel's nonawareness of PTO rules does not constitute unavoidable delay); Vincent v. Mossinghoff, 1985 U.S. Dist. Lexis 23119, 13 230 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 621 (D.D.C. 1985) (Plaintiffs through their counsel's actions or their own must be held responsible for having noted the MPEP section and Official Gazette notices expressly stating that the certified mailing procedures outlined in 37 CFR 1.8(a) do not apply to continuation applications).

⁴ Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 5 USPQ2d 1130 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

⁵ The Commissioner is responsible for determining the standard for unavoidable delay and for applying that standard 35 U.S.C. 41(c)(1) states, "The Commissioner may accept the payment of any maintenance fee...at any time...if the delay is shown to the *satisfaction of the Commissioner* to have been unavoidable (emphasis added).

⁶ Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d at 533.

⁷ *Id.* at 538.

⁸ In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 U.S.P.Q. 666, 167-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 U.S.P.Q. 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913).

- The instant petition was filed on behalf of patentee Richard Brown. Patentee discovered the status of the patent on April 25, 2012.
- Patentee states that Canadian law firm Barrigar & Moss represented patentee upon filing of the application.
- On January 22, 1999, Ted Urbanek of Barrigar & Moss informed patentee that maintenance fees would be due 3.5, 7.5 and 11.5 year after the patent was granted.
- Patentee states that he did not receive any communications from Barrigar & Moss regarding maintenance fees for the instant patent.
- Patentee argues that he took several steps to ensure the timely payment of the maintenance fee, which included: reliance on the firm of Barrigar and Moss to provide reminders, updating the USPTO of a new correspondence address upon each move and paying the Canadian Post Office to forward mail to his current address
- Patentee argues that he reasonably relied on several entities (his attorneys, the Canadian Post Office and the UPTO) for providing reminders about the due date of the eight year maintenance fee. Consequently, patentee contends the failure to receive a reminder resulted in unavoidable delay.
- Patentees state the USPTO failed to enter the change of address which resulted in not receiving a reminder.
- The petition also indicates that unbeknownst to patentee, Barrigar & Moss dissolved before the eighth year maintenance fee came due.
- Lastly, patentee contends that prompt corrective action was taken upon the discovery of the "abandonment" of the patent.

APPLICATION OF THE UNAVOIDABLE STANDARD

Petitioner's arguments have been considered but are not persuasive. In general a grantable petition under 37 CFR 1.378 (b) must show 1) petitioner knew of the need to make the maintenance fee payment, 2) implemented a reliable docketing system to track the relevant dates 3) treated the payment of the maintenance fee (and later the filing of a petition to reinstate) as his most important business 4) was prevented from making the payment and 5) must show the entire delay in making the payment and submitting a grantable petition was unavoidable.

In essence, petitioner must show that he was aware of the need to pay the maintenance fee, and to that end was tracking it, or had engaged someone to track it before the expiration, but when the fee came due, was "unavoidably" prevented from making the maintenance fee payment due.

In determining whether a delay in paying a maintenance fee was unavoidable, one looks to whether the party responsible for payment of the maintenance fee exercised the due care of a reasonably prudent person. Ray, 55 F3d at 608-609, 34 USPQ2d at 1787. It is incumbent upon the patent owner to implement steps to schedule and pay the fee, or obligate another to do so. See California Medical Products v. Technol. Med. Prod., 921 F.Supp 1219, 1259 (D. Del. 1995). That is, 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3) requires a showing of the steps in place to pay the maintenance fee, and the record currently lacks a showing that any steps were emplaced by petitioner or anyone else. In the absence of a showing that petitioner or anyone else was engaged in tracking the maintenance fee due dates, and that party had in fact been tracking the due dates with a reliable tracking system, such as would be used by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business, petitioner cannot reasonably show that the delay was unavoidable delay. In re Katrapat, 6 USPQ2d 1863, 1867-1868 (Comm'r Pat. 1988); California, supra.

When determining whether a delay in paying a maintenance fee is unavoidable, the Office looks at whether the party responsible for payment of the maintenance fee exercised the due care of a reasonably prudent person.⁹ The petition and the declaration of patentee do not demonstrate that either Barrigar & Moss or patentee Brown implemented a reliable docketing system. Relying on the mailing of a maintenance fee reminder that may be mailed is not a reliable docketing system.

It is solely the responsibility of the patentee to ensure that the maintenance fee is paid timely to prevent expiration of the patent. Failure to monitor the status of a patent does not reflect the due care and diligence employed by a prudent and careful person with respect to their most important business and as such cannot demonstrate that the delay was unavoidable delay. The record lacks any showing that patentee Brown took any action to prevent the expiration of the patent. Further, no evidence has been provided to establish that Barrigar & Moss ever informed patentee that they would be responsible for tracking the maintenance fee due dates.

Petitioner argues if the change of address purportedly submitted on November 2006 had been entered, a reminder notice would have been received and the maintenance fee would have been paid. However, a review of the record does not show that the Office was in receipt of a request to change the address on or about November 2006. Nor has petitioner provided any evidence that such a request to change the correspondence address was submitted. The argument that patentee had a clear pattern of providing timely notification of change of address based upon the submission of two prior requests does not establish that a third request was promptly filed with the Office.

Notwithstanding the lack of receipt of the change of address request, under the statutes and the regulations, the Office has no duty to notify patentees when their maintenance fees are due. It is the responsibility of the patentee to ensure that the maintenance fees are paid to prevent expiration of the patent. The Office will, however, provide some notices as reminders that maintenance fees are due, but the notices, errors in the notices or in their delivery, or the lack or tardiness of notices will in no way relieve a patentee from the responsibility to make timely payment of each maintenance fee to prevent the patent from expiring by operation of law. The

⁹ See Kim v. Quigg, 718 F. Supp 1280, 1284 12 USPQ2d 1604, 1607(E.D. Va 1989).

notices provided by the Office are courtesies in nature and intended to aid patentees. The Office's provision of notices in no way shifts the burden of monitoring the time for paying maintenance fees on patents from the patentee to the Office. A reasonably prudent person would have ensured that the Office had an appropriate address where he could receive any possible communications mailed.

In the absence of a showing that any steps had been taken, then 37 CFR 1.378(b) precludes acceptance of the payment. In other words, if no steps were taken by Mr. Brown to track the fee payment, then the subsequent delay is immaterial. The showing must be that when the system indicated the fee fell due, petitioner was "unavoidably" prevented from taking any earlier action with respect to this patent.

Accordingly, the facts presented do not allow for a finding of unavoidable delay.

When filing documentation in support of applications or petitions, please take steps to protect all personal information. "Personal information" includes social security, credit card and banking account numbers. This type of personal data is never required by the USPTO to support a petition or application. To protect your privacy, we suggest that you delete such information from any documentation you send the office.

The file does not indicate a change of address has been submitted, although the address given on the petition differs from the address of record. If appropriate, a change of address should be filed in accordance with MPEP 601.03. A courtesy copy of this decision is being mailed to the address given on the petition; however, the Office will mail all future correspondence solely to the address of record.

Petitioner's current options

I. Petitioner may file a request for reconsideration.

Any request for reconsideration of this decision must be filed within **TWO MONTHS** of the mailing date of this decision. Any such petition for reconsideration must be accompanied by the \$400 petition fee set forth in §1.17(h). After decision on the petition for reconsideration, no further reconsideration or review of the matter will be undertaken by the Director. Accordingly, on request for reconsideration, it is extremely important the petitioner supply **any** and **all** relevant information and documentation in order to meet his burden of showing unavoidable delay. This includes statements by all persons with direct knowledge of the cause of the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them. If a request for reconsideration is filed, it must establish that the entire delay in the submission of the maintenance fee was unavoidable.

II. Petitioner may request a refund of the maintenance fee and surcharge which accompanied the petition.

Petitioner may request a refund of the maintenance fee and surcharge by writing to the Office of Finance, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313. A copy of this decision should accompany petitioner's request.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:


By Mail: Mail Stop PETITION
 Commissioner for Patents
 Post Office Box 1450
 Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By Hand: U. S. Patent and Trademark Office
 Customer Service Window, Mail Stop Petitions
 Randolph Building
 401 Dulany Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314

The centralized facsimile number is (571) 273-8300.

Correspondence regarding this decision may also be filed through the electronic filing system of the USPTO.

Telephone inquiries should be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3215.



Charlema Grant
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Office of Petitions